

# **MAYOR'S COMMITTEE FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES**

## **FEBRUARY 23, 2009**

### **MINUTES – Meeting in Newton City Hall – Cafeteria**

**PRESENT:** Jane Brown, Rob Caruso (Co-Chair), Jini Fairley, Rosemary Larking, Heather Platt, Girard Plante, Doug Sweet (Co-Chair)  
**REGRETS:** Lucie Chansky, Jason Rosenberg  
**STAFF:** Kathleen Cahill (Planning & Development)

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D. Sweet announced that he would be leaving the meeting this evening at 7:30pm to appear before the Zoning and Planning Committee, a sub-committee of the Board of Aldermen. His appearance before the Zoning and Planning Committee is a response to his appointment, to the Planning and Development Board, by the Mayor. Doug stated that he will resign from the Mayor's Committee for Disabilities after his appointment is voted on by the Board of Aldermen. The Committee collectively congratulated Doug.

The meeting was called to order at 6:45pm and chaired by Rob Caruso.

### **MINUTES**

D. Sweet made a motion to accept the minutes from the January 26 meeting. J. Fairley seconded the motion. The Committee voted 7-0-0 to approve the minutes.

### **CDBG ACCESS PROJECTS REPORT**

This report was submitted to MCPD by email before this meeting for their review. Per usual it is copied here within the minutes. K. Cahill presented the report. Comments are noted after each project.

**Accessible Pedestrian Signals** (Project CD0703C. Expended, \$7,818; Budget balance: \$11,995). The installation of APS-10 audible pedestrian signals at the intersections of Walnut and Cabot and Beacon and Chestnut, Commonwealth Avenue by St. Ignatius and Beacon and Hammond St. near McElroy Commons was completed in November. Centre St. and Centre Ave. is a priority intersection; however that is on-hold until pending a final decision by the Newton Corner Advisory Committee on VHB conceptual plans (the NCAC will meet January 27, 2009 at 6:30pm at Evans Park in Newton Corner to discuss this project MCPD members are welcome). Washington St. and Commonwealth Ave. is another priority intersection. VHB is currently doing the design work for this intersection. Hopefully the project will include accessible pedestrian signals funded from traffic mitigation funds. Other priority locations submitted to traffic engineering include: Washington and Beacon as well as Washington Street by Newton-Wellesley Hospital.

Comments: J. Fairley indicated she attended a meeting of the Newton Corner Advisory Committee (NCAC) last month. The Committee discussed pedestrian improvements to Centre Street and Centre Avenue. Discussion focused on implementing changes to the crosswalk that spans both streets. The Committee discussed leveling the ramp up to the island however there was a question of funds with regard to this change. H. Platt asked if the Committee is considering straightening out the crosswalk. J. Fairley responded that because this change will alter the direction of the curb cuts it is not being considered. D. Sweet stated that noise plays a

factor in this intersection. The audible pedestrian signals will need to be set to a high volume.

H. Platt stated that Carroll School considers this intersection so dangerous that students are urged to take a bus to Watertown Yard in order to transfer to another bus (#52) to avoid having to navigate the intersection. J. Fairley felt discouraged that NCAC was not planning on using neighborhood CDBG funds to install audible pedestrian signals. She voiced hesitancy at recommending access funding this project. K. Cahill explained CDBG with regard to the four target neighborhoods (West Newton, Newtonville, Newton Corner, and Nonantum). These target neighborhoods have the highest concentrations of low and moderate income persons. CDBG funding rotates among these four neighborhoods, throughout the five-year strategic plan. For example, in FY06 West Newton and Newtonville are allocated CDBG funds, in FY07 Newton Corner is allocated funds, and in FY08 Nonantum receives CDBG funds.

D. Sweet inquired about the status of improvements to the intersection at Washington and Commonwealth Avenue. K. Cahill responded that the City is waiting for movement by purchasing in order to determine what the mitigation funds will cover. C. Schuckel plans on implementing audible pedestrian funds in the intersection if there is enough funding.

Plans for installing audible pedestrian signals are held up until the City renews or establishes a new contract with a vendor. D. Sweet stated that the Mayor's Committee should push for a policy that all new or replacement traffic signals should be required to have audible pedestrian signals. K. Cahill agreed to investigate the process for advocating for this type of policy.

K. Cahill requested the Committee's comments (on behalf of the City Traffic Engineer) on countdown signals. Countdown signals are currently in place at Washington and Walnut, Park and Tremont, and Adams and Watertown. H. Platt stated that the countdown signals in general are helpful for those with vision, and the signals would be most helpful to the visually impaired if it was audible. H. Platt explained the way the countdown currently works – the chirping begins with the walking person signal and continues until the flashing red hand appears. D. Sweet indicated that the current timing for signals on Washington Street does not allow a person to advance across the entire street. The timing on these walk signals need to be extended and the tone should be changed half way through to indicate that timing is running out!

K. Cahill also asked the Committee how they felt about plans to change the intersection of Beacon Street and Centre Street in Newton Centre from mutually exclusive to concurrent. This change was recommended by Newton Corner consultant. H. Platt stated that the concurrent signal is better for the visually impaired because they can distinguish the flow of the traffic. Heather's concerns regarding the switch include: there is too much right turn red traffic, cars turning left onto Centre often end up "stuck" in the center of the intersection and turn left on red causing possible problems for pedestrians crossing at that time, and in general the aggressive nature of cars at this intersection. Generally, Heather would NOT recommend changing the pedestrian phase from exclusive to concurrent if there are no changes to the light cycles. One ideal intersection to institute this change would be Walnut and Commonwealth. R. Larking brought up an issue with the pedestrian button nearest the Bank of America. This button needs to be made accessible – it's small and old.

**Norumbega Gardens** (Project CD0903B. Expended: \$28,475 Budget balance, \$28,165). Project includes accessible improvements to interior pathways in the Norumbega Garden Apartments, a complex operated by the Housing Authority. Work began September 16, 2008,

100% complete (on time--November 1<sup>st</sup>). Balance will be transferred into contingencies but may be allocated to another access project upon request.

Comments: K.Cahill indicated that Norumbega came in \$28,165 under budget. This money will be transferred into contingencies and can then be requested by the Mayor's Committee for another access project.

G. Plante stated that there were already problems with the project. These problems include asphalt that was laid over water connections and a large hole both in the main driveway that extends from Ash Street to the rear of the complex. K.Cahill will speak to DPW and Harvey Epstein about these issues.

K.Cahill recommended that the funds be spent on curb cuts, a high priority for the Committee. Heather made a motion that the Committee recommend the allocation of \$19,214 from the Norumbega project in funds to be spent on curb cuts, J. Brown seconded the motion and the Committee voted 6-0-0 to approve this recommendation. K. Cahill agreed to contact S. Tocci to get the latest estimate for materials. The Committee looked at the priority list and stated the highest priorities include: Union Street and Herrick Road, Walnut Street and Washington, Lowell and Washington, and Washington and Crafts. H. Platt cautioned that the cut-through at Crafts should be straightened and include a tactile/truncated dome.

**Charlesbank Playground** (Project CD0903C. Expended: \$0 Budget balance, \$30,000). Project includes the installation of a ramped concrete walkway with metal handrails, designed to complement new play equipment, benches, and picnic tables and allow access through the park.

Comments: There is no update on Charlesbank, a project in Newton Corner.

**Curb Cuts** (Project CD0903G, Expended \$58,689 Budget balance, \$27,400). Funds were used to complete the following curb cuts: Auburn and Washington (4/widening of island) Mason-Rice (6), Temple and Myrtle (2), JFK Circle (2). Committee earmarked remaining funds for curb cuts on Everett and Gibbs and Sumner and Gibbs in Newton Centre. Construction on these curb cuts will begin in the spring.

**Retrofitting Curb Cuts** (Project CD0903E, Budget balance, \$6,000). A list of 7 locations (Homer Street, Beacon St. @ Dalton, Centre Green @ Langley, 1188 Centre Green, 82 Lincoln Street, 100 Walnut Street, 28 Commonwealth St) (19 curb cuts) have been identified by committee members and staff. Work will take place during the spring construction season.

Comments: DPW has been reminded of the 7 locations, 19 curb cuts that will be retrofitted.

**FY09 Funds** (Project CD0903A. \$15,045) – This project represents funds available for project(s) to be determined.

The following include the FY10 Access project recommendations:

Cold Spring Park Accessible Route (Phase I):	\$35,000
Crystal Lake Accessible Path:	\$8,951
Accessible Curb Cuts:	\$75,000
<u>Audible Pedestrian Signals:</u>	<u>\$4,049</u>
Total Requests	\$123,000

Comments:

The recommendations will go before the Planning and Development Board April 6. G. Plante agreed to represent the Committee at this public hearing.

K. Cahill also stated that at the next meeting she will be talking about scheduling public hearings, public meetings, and focus groups that are part of the needs assessment for the five-year Consolidated Plan.

K. Cahill summarized the ongoing debate between fiberglass and molded concrete for truncated domes. The Committee's collective recommendation was to continue to use the concrete mold for now. H. Platt mentioned that the truncated domes should span the entire panel (3X5 is acceptable).

**OTHER BUSINESS:**

**Snow Removal:** The Committee collectively agreed that snow removal is a continual issue city-wide. R. Caruso has experienced positive results when he sends a personal letter including the language of the City's snow removal ordinance. K. Cahill agreed to send a copy of the flyer (including snow removal ordinance language) to the Committee. The Committee is invited to use these flyers to communicate with businesses that are in violation. R. Larking mentioned that CVS and Peet's Coffee are repeat violators of the snow removal ordinance.

K. Cahill explained that the process for snow removal enforcement includes distribution of three letters from DPW to the business in violation, followed by a fine. The Mayor's Committee agreed to convene a snow removal sub-committee to examine snow removal policies in other towns and cities and contact elected officials about increasing/establishing fines for business owners/homeowners. This work will be completed in the spring and summer in preparation for next winter. K. Cahill will forward an email to B. Droz about an invitation to form a snow removal sub-committee. R. Larking also suggested working through the media to educate City business owners and homeowners about the importance of snow removal.

In response to the poor snow removal situation this year the Committee will send a letter to DPW Commissioner Tom Daly. R. Caruso will draft this letter mentioning that snow is being plowed by city officials and contractors into curb cuts, which creates access problems. K. Cahill will supply Rob with Tom Daly's information.

**Johnny's Luncheonette:** K. Cahill indicated that Mike Kruse, Head of the Planning Department is working with John Lojek to establish a more efficient process for access complaints. In the meantime, K. Cahill has not heard back from John First, owner of Johnny's Luncheonette, regarding the automatic door. The Committee plans to make a formal complaint to the Architectural Access Board. Rob Caruso agreed to write a letter to Tom Hopkins, the Executive Director of the Architectural Access Board (AAB). K. Cahill will provide Rob with contact information for the AAB and a copy of the variance for Johnny's Luncheonette. K. Cahill will speak to B. Droz about the need to visit Johnny's Luncheonette to measure the height of the accessible table.

**Handicap Parking:**

The Committee discussed the handicap parking issues around the Golden Living Center, 25 Armory Street. The Committee recommended that the parking space at the end of Armory Street

(corner) be eliminated. This space does not appear to be usable in the winter because snow is collected and piled on this space. The space closest to the Golden Living Center should be kept in tact since it is the closest to the assisted living center. At most the space across from the Golden Living Center, on the Armory side and closer to Washington Street should be removed. The Committee collectively recommends that if spaces are eliminated on the street new handicap spaces should be created inside the parking lot (across the street from the Golden Living Center). The Mayor's Committee believes that the problem getting through with an emergency vehicle may be an issue with snow removal. The Committee does not understand why the issue is not being reviewed as a safety issue by the Newton Fire Department if emergency vehicles cannot get through.

The Committee would like the number of spaces in each village to be compared with the number required in order to determine if regulations are met. This should occur before any studies are commenced.

There was a motion to adjourn at 8:45 pm.

**The next meeting will be on Monday, March 16, 2009 at 6:30pm in the cafeteria.**

Respectfully submitted by K.Cahill